

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 9 th September 2003	MEETING NAME Executive
Report title:		Mid-Term Review of Bellenden Renewal Area	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		The Lane and South Camberwell	
From:		Strategic Director of Housing	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Executive note the findings of Bellenden Renewal document attached as Appendix One.
2. That the Executive agree the Action Plan in principle and subject to the availability of resources.
3. That the Executive agree as part of that Action Plan the specific proposal with regard to Gowlett and Hinckley Roads, set out at paragraph 12.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. The Bellenden Renewal Area was declared by full Council on 16th July 1997.
At the time of declaration the estimated rate of unfit dwellings in the Area was 18% - more than twice the borough average for private sector stock at the time. The old Bellenden Ward contained the highest level of private rented housing in the borough as well as the highest number of properties unfit to occupy due to the lack of modern amenities. An estimated 35% of residents were dependent upon state benefits. This was why Bellenden was chosen from over 10 possible renewal area sites that were examined during 1996.
5. The Renewal Area had eight original objectives, these were:
 - Housing: to provide a better standard of housing for the people of the area
 - Environment: to seek an overall improvement in the local environment, including traffic and open spaces
 - Employment: to seek to facilitate access to employment and training opportunities
 - Economic Regeneration: to maximise the involvement of the private sector

- Community Development: to involve local communities in the decision making process
 - Crime: to reduce crime and the fear of crime
 - Health: to seek to achieve an improvement in the health and quality of life of the community
 - Financial: seek to identify both public and private investment opportunities.
6. It can be seen that the aims of the Renewal Area went beyond traditional housing improvements from the outset. Pages 6-17 of the review document assesses progress against each of these objectives.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

7. As part of the review process a questionnaire was circulated to residents. The summarised results of this are included as Appendix 2.

Fully measurable targets were only set for the housing element of the Renewal Area strategy. Progress against these targets has been good. The main target was to improve 729 dwellings and at December 2002 564 dwellings had been achieved, representing 77% performance at the midway stage of the project.

Similarly the second housing target was to deliver energy efficiency improvements to 750 dwellings. Against this 574, or 76%, had been achieved by the end of 2002.

Of 300 HMO's targeted for action, enforcement action has improved 42 and 10 grants had been approved. However, changes in working practices, such as the move toward greater self regulation of dwellings by landlords and the decline in overall numbers of HMO's brought about by the improving housing market have clearly been factors.

The final housing target relates to empty homes. Whilst there had been 77 dwellings brought back into use by December 2002 there are still high numbers of voids with the 2001 Empty Property survey detecting 197 empty private dwellings in the area. This suggests the need for continued action in the area.

8. In terms of other projects the key concern of residents has been environmental projects. There were no fully measurable targets here. Despite this the formula for calculating subsidisable spend that existed at the time, meant that the Council could spend up to £3.3m, over the ten years, and claim subsidy at 50%.

At December 2002 £2.6m or 81% of this subsidisable spend had been achieved. The improvements to shopping areas, open spaces, schools, facades of buildings, lighting and pavements have clearly had an effect and the evidence suggests that most residents now have a positive view of their area.

However, there are some areas that continue to give cause for concern. Chief amongst these are pavements with 50% of surveyed residents viewing these as either poor or bad. Street Cleaning also records a combined "poor and bad" score of 40 %, which is up from 35% in 1996. However it should be noted that this data predates the introduction of the Southwark Cleaning Contract and the Renewal Team have already received positive feedback about improved cleanliness in the area.

Residents have also recorded only a slight improvement in street lighting with 22.8% recording as poor or bad against 23.5% in 1996. Traffic also remains a major concern with residents feeling that the Council has done very little to improve matters since declaration. The proposed traffic scheme to be implemented in the current financial year will address this.

9. The overall picture is of significant achievements against the Housing targets with work still to be done on some aspects of the local environment. The issues above need to be considered against the backdrop of a genuine "buzz" about the area with many people wishing to set up businesses locally and the transformation of Bellenden Road itself. These developments have enabled the Council to win a Local Tourism Initiative award from Visit London (formerly the London Tourist Board). The Renewal Area has also helped develop the local community through consultation on local schemes.

"Bellenden" is now recognised as an area with its own distinct identity. Despite this it is clear that work remains to be done on the local environment and this is reflected in the proposed action plan set out below.

10. Whilst there will be a continuing need to deliver housing improvements progress on these has been good. Residents still wish to see a number of environmental improvements with regard to pavements, lighting, traffic, street cleaning and Choumert Market. Some of these issues are clearly corporate and developments outside the Renewal Area will have an effect. In particular it is understood that the Southwark Cleaning contract is having a positive effect and there is anecdotal evidence from residents and traders that the area is now cleaner than it has been for some time.

Budget Difficulties

11. Towards the end of the financial year 2001/02 it became clear that there was a major budget shortfall affecting the overall Private Housing Renewal budget. This had a severe effect on Bellenden schemes throughout 2002.

Many schemes were postponed and there was considerable disappointment and anger from residents. Issues with regard to the long term PHR budget still need to be resolved and consequently any consideration of the action plan is very much dependent upon the availability of future resources.

Three proposed Group Repair Schemes were effected by the budget shortfall - these were the Small Roads Scheme, the Marsden Road scheme and the Gowlett and Hinckley Road schemes. The first of these is on site and the second will commence in October 2003.

Gowlett and Hinckley Roads

12. This proposed Group Repair scheme was the least advanced of the three under preparation when the budget shortfall was identified with no contractual commitment having been made. Despite this several meetings to discuss a scheme with residents had been held and residents were understandably disappointed when the scheme did not proceed.

The changes made by the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 have now ended Group Repair in its statutory format. The Council is able to deliver similar schemes but has decided to consider the need for these in 2004 after the completion of the proposed Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment. It is therefore not possible to deliver a Group Repair scheme in Gowlett and Hinckley Roads as originally requested.

As a consequence it is proposed to pro-actively invite low income households in the two roads to apply for Southwark Small Works Grant and the Southwark Home Improvement Loan, whilst promoting home maintenance initiatives to the remaining households. Costs with regard to this are estimated to be in the region of 375k and are included in the action plan below.

The Action Plan

13. The Action Plan is set out in full on pages 26 and 27 of the Review and costed below under financial implications.

All of the actions relate either to issues identified at declaration in 1997 or by the residents survey that has been ongoing since late 2001. The costs of delivering the proposed schemes could be spread over the remaining four years of the renewal area.

It should be noted that an environmental improvement scheme for Choumert Market is also being considered and resources for this have been identified in the current financial year and are therefore not discussed in the section below.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

14. At declaration there was specific subsidy available for Group Repair and Environmental Improvements. This ended with the introduction of the single pot for housing. There is currently no confirmed budget for this area of work for 2004/05 and beyond and members are therefore only asked to agree the proposed action plan in principle and subject to the availability of future resources.

The work set out in the Action Plan has been costed by Officers on the basis of costs for similar schemes already completed. These costs are reasonably robust given the Units experience of delivering such schemes. Costs could be spread across the remaining four years of the Renewal Area and would not all have to fall within the next financial year.

Not all elements of the Action Plan have a direct capital cost but those that do have been provisionally costed as follows:

Gowlett and Hinckley Roads	£375K
Pavement Improvements to 5 Roads to 2007	£300K
Lighting Improvements to 5 Roads to 2007	£150K
Peckham Rye Shopping and Environmental Improvements	£300K
Upgrade to Goose Green	£ 75K
Youthbuild Scheme	£ 50K
Empty Homes Work in Shopping Areas	£300K

Total: £1.550m

Of these sums £75K for Goose Green is currently in the 2003/04 programme, reducing unprogrammed costs to £1.475m.

If Members decide to proceed with the Action Plan as set out, costs for the above schemes should not significantly exceed the £1.475m set out above.

A provisional sum of £1.5m should therefore deliver the outstanding elements of the action plan with costs spread over several financial years.

Officers will explore the possibility of obtaining Community Council funding in support of the proposed schemes.

CONCURRENT REPORT OF CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

15. The action plan to complete improvements at Bellenden as indicated above is anticipated to cost in the region of £1.475m, phased over three years until 2007. To enable the scheme to be completed a capital budget for this sum needs to be approved. At present the capital programme includes budget provision for private housing renewal for 2003/04 and this is fully committed. Members will be asked to consider and approve capital funding requests, such as Bellenden, as part of the Policy and Resourcing strategy and budget preparation for 2004/05 - 2006/07. This is to commence in October and will be finalised in February 2004 with the setting of the Councils budget. Therefore the action plan cannot be implemented until a budget for the scheme has been approved.

CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE BOROUGH SOLICITOR

16. Paragraph 3 of the report invites members to agree a specific proposal which would allow the local authority to pro-actively invite applications for loans and grants from low income house-holds in Gowlett and Hinckley roads and promote home maintenance initiatives amongst the others.

In inviting applications for loans, the local authority may be promoting its financial products. Provided that the authority limits itself to promoting only its own products, this is something that the local authority can do. Before entering into any loan arrangements the local authority must advise the applicant to consult an independent financial advisor.

In giving loans the local authority will be exercising a role akin to that of a commercial lender. Commercial lenders are required to comply with the provisions of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and the Consumer Credit Act.

Local authorities are specifically exempt from the requirements of the former but must follow the spirit of the legislation. Local authorities must comply with the relevant parts of the latter. This includes ensuring that all documentation carries correctly worded advice and that the correct procedures are followed.

The local authority must also satisfy itself that recipients of financial assistance have received appropriate advice or information on any obligations to which they will become subject in consequence of the provision of assistance. This is a requirement of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002.

One of the council's key objectives under the new housing renewal policy is to improve areas of poor housing and help vulnerable people. Inviting applications from low-income families in an area that has been identified as a renewal area could be seen as facilitating the achievement of the council's objectives in this area. It would also support the council's strategic priorities.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

17. There are no specific equal opportunities issues arising from this report.

LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

18. Many Bellenden schemes include works that support the Council's Agenda 21 policy.

CONSULTATION

19. The Review has incorporated the views of residents gathered via the questionnaire. However it is necessary to re-establish a consultative body for the area within the wider consultative structure.

As set out in the Conclusions section of the review (from page 23 onwards) officers accept the failure of the communications strategy over the last 18 months. This is being put right with the recent newsletter and summary of the review but this improvement needs to be sustained over the remaining life of the area.

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Bellenden renewal files	21-23 Bournemouth Rd. and 174 Bellenden Rd. SE15	Pat O'Reilly 020 7525 4110

Audit Trail.

Lead Officer	Rachel Sharpe , Head of Strategy and Regeneration	
Report Author	Pat O'Reilly , Private Housing Renewal Manager	
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Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Borough Solicitor & Secretary	Yes	Yes
Chief Finance Officer	Yes	Yes
<i>List other Officers here</i>		
Executive Member	Yes	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services		